



ANOÛS MELANOPS, *Gould.*

Lesser Noddy.

Anoüs ——— ? (Lesser Noddy), Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part xii. p. 36.

Anoüs melanops, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part xiii. p. 104.

THIS species is very nearly allied to, but quite distinct from, the *Anoüs tenuirostris* (*Sterna tenuirostris*, Temm.), from which it may at once be distinguished by the black marks before and behind the eye, of which no trace is represented in M. Temminck's figure in the "Planches Coloriées"; neither are these conspicuous marks alluded to in his description. All that has been said respecting the Noddy is equally descriptive of this bird. It is as abundant in the Australian seas, and at the breeding-season resorts to similar situations. On the Houtmann's Abrolhos it is even more numerous; like the Noddy, it is truly gregarious, the nests being arranged as closely as possible on the branches of the mangrove, at a height of from four to ten feet above the ground, the sea-weed of which each nest is constructed being merely thrown across the branch, without any regard to form, until it has accumulated to a mass varying from two to four inches in height; in many instances long pieces of sea-weed hang down beneath the branch, giving it the appearance of a much larger structure than the reality; the nests and the branches of the trees are completely whitened with the excrement of the bird, the disagreeable and sickly odour of which is perceptible at a considerable distance. South Island, Houtmann's Abrolhos, appears to be the only one resorted to for the purpose of nidification; for although large mangroves occur on others of the neighbouring islands, it was not observed on any of them. "I have seen many vast flocks of birds," says Mr. Gilbert, "but I confess I was not at all prepared for the surprise I experienced in witnessing the amazing clouds, literally speaking, of these birds when congregating in the evening while they had their young to feed. Their alternate departure and return with food during the day, in the same route, had a most singular appearance. From their breeding-place to the outer reef, beyond the smooth water, the distance is four miles; and over this space the numbers constantly passing were in such close array that they formed one continuous and unbroken line. After the young birds were able to accompany their parents, I observed that they all left the breeding or roosting-place in the morning and did not again return until evening, the first-comers apparently awaiting the arrival of the last before finally roosting for the night. It is when thus assembling that their immense numbers strike you with astonishment. Even those who have witnessed the vast flights of the Passenger Pigeon, so vividly described by Audubon, could hardly avoid expressing surprise at seeing the multitudes of these birds which at sunset move in one dense mass over and around the roosting-place, when the noise of the old birds, the quack and the piping whistle of the young ones, are almost deafening. Like its near ally, it commences the task of incubation in December, and lays but a single egg; while sitting on which, or tending its young, it is very easily caught, as it will suffer itself to be taken off the nest rather than quit it. It forms an excellent article of food, and several hundreds were daily killed during our stay on the island. As this bird resorts to the upper branches alone, it is secure from the attacks of the lizard, so destructive to the Noddy, the animal not being able to climb the branches with sufficient facility to capture it; and this may doubtless be one of the causes why it is more numerous than any of the many other birds inhabiting the islands."

The egg is of a pale stone or cream colour, marked all over with large irregular-shaped blotches of dull chestnut-red and dark brown, the latter appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell; the blotches are thinly dispersed except at the larger end, where they are largest and most numerous; it is one inch and three-quarters long by one inch and five-sixteenths broad.

There is no visible difference in the outward appearance of the sexes.

Crown of the head and back of the neck light ash-colour, passing into deep grey on the mantle and back; immediately before the eyes a large patch, and behind a smaller one, of jet-black; posterior half of the lower and a smaller space on the upper lash snow-white; throat, forepart of the neck and all the under surface deep sooty black; wings and all the under surface of the same colour, but rather browner; bill black; tarsi and toes brownish black.

The figures represent a male and a female of the natural size.